



# THE CONNOISSEUR.

By Mr. T O W N,

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*Viâ sacrâ, sicut meus est mos,  
Nescio quid meditans nugarum, et totus in illis.*

HOR.

To Mr. T O W N.

S I R,



T has been generally imagined, that learning is only to be acquired in the closet, and by turning over a great number of pages; for which reason men have been assiduous to heap together a parcel of dusty volumes, and our youth have been sent to study at the universities: as if knowledge was shut up in a library, and chained to the shelves together with the folios. This prejudice has made every one overlook the most obvious and ready means of coming at literature; while (as the wise man has re-

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marked) "Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice  
"in the streets; she crieth in the chief place of concourse,  
"in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her  
"words," and no man regardeth her. Every lane teems  
with instruction, and every alley is big with erudition:  
though the ignorant or incurious passer-by shuts his eyes  
against that universal volume of arts and sciences, which  
constantly lies open before him in the highways and bye-  
places; like the laws of the *Romans*, which were hung up  
in the public streets.

You must know, Mr. Town, that I am a very hard  
student, and have perhaps gleaned more knowledge from  
my reading, than any of your poring fellows of colleges,  
though I was never possessed of so much as an horn-book.  
In the course of my studies I have followed the example of  
of the ancient *Peripatetics*, who used to study walking:  
and as I had not the advantage to be brought up a scholar,  
I have been obliged, like the *Lacedæmonian* children, to  
the public for my education. My first relish for letters I got  
by conning over these elegant monosyllables, which are  
chalked out upon walls and gates, and which (as pretty  
books for children are adorned with cuts) are generally en-  
forced and explained by curious hieroglyphics in *caricatura*.  
I soon made a further progress in the alphabet by staring  
up at the large letters upon play-bills, &c. 'till at length I  
was enabled to make out the inscriptions upon signs, bills  
on empty houses, and the titles on rubric-posts. From  
these I proceeded gradually to higher branches of literature,  
and went through a complete course of physic by perusing  
the learned treatises of Dr. *Rock* and other eminent practi-  
tioners. Having thus laid in the rudiments of literature, my  
method

method has since been to visit the *Philobiblian* libraries, and other learned stalls, and the noble collections at *Moor-fields*; in which choice repositories I have with infinite pleasure and advantage run over the elaborate systems of ancient divines, politicians, and philosophers, which have escaped the fury of pastry-cooks and trunk-makers. As for the modern writings of pamphletteers and magazine-compilers, I make it my business to take my rounds every morning at the open shops about the *Royal Exchange*; where I never fail to run through every thing, fresh as it comes out. Thus, for example, I make a shift to squint over the first page of the *Connoisseur*, as it lies before me, at Mrs. Cooke's; at the next shop I steal a peep at the middle pages, at another proceed on to the fourth or fifth, and perhaps return again to conclude it at Mrs. Cooke's. By the same means I am myself become a *Connoisseur* likewise; and you will be surprised when I assure you, that I have a great variety of the finest prints and paintings, and am master of a more curious set of nicknacks, than are to be found in Sir *Hans Sloane's Collection*: for, as I constantly survey the windows of every printshop, and attend every auction, I look upon every curiosity as actually in my possession; and you will agree with me, that while I have the opportunity of seeing them, the real owners cannot have more satisfaction in locking them up in cabinets and museums.

You will conclude, that the knowledge, which I have thus picked out of the streets, has been very extensive: I have learned at every corner, that the scurvy is a popular disease,—that the bloody flux cannot be cured by any of the faculty, except the gentlewoman at the blue posts in *Haydon Yard*,—that nervous diseases were never so frequent,  
—and

—and that the royal family and most of our nobility are troubled with corns;—and many other curious particulars of the same kind. I have also got a smattering of the *French* language from the advertisements of taylor and staymakers, and of Mrs. *Dubois's* portable soup, in *French* and *English*. I was completely grounded in politics by stopping at *Temple Bar* every morning to read the *Gazetteer*, which used to be pasted up there to the great emolument of the hackney-coachmen upon their stands. But above all, I have acquired the most sublime notions of religion by listening attentively to the spirited harangues of our most eminent field-preachers: and I confess myself highly obliged to the itinerant missionaries of *Wesley*, *Whitefield*, and *Zinzendorf*, who have instructed us in the New Light from empty barrels and joint-stools. Next to these, I have received great improvements from the vociferous retailers of poetry; as I constantly used to thrust myself into the circle gathered round them, and listen to their ditties, till I could carry away both words and tune. I have likewise got some notion of the drama by attending the theatres; though my finances were too scanty for me ever to get admittance into them. I therefore had recourse to the following practice: I would contrive to hear one act at the outside of one of the pit-doors; the next act I took my stand at the other; and as the author generally rises in the middle, I could catch the most tearing parts during the third act in the passage to the two-shilling gallery: in the fourth act the rants came tolerably loud to my ear at the entrance of the upper gallery; and I very attentively listened to the pathetic at the conclusion of the play with the footmen in the lobby.

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ENDOWED with so much learning, you will doubtless be curious to know to what purposes I have turned it. Almost before I could read at all, I got into the service of a very eminent doctor of physick, who employed me in sticking up his bills, and slipping them slyly into the hands of spindle-shanked young fellows, as they passed by. After this, by closely studying these elegant compositions, I got together a sufficient set of medical phrases, which (by the help of *Bayley's* dictionary) enabled me to draw up bills and affidavits for those doctors, who were not so happy as to be able to write or read. I was next promoted to the garret of a printer of bloody murders, where my business was to invent terrible stories, write *Yorkshire* tragedies, or Christmas carols, and occasionally to put the Ordinary of *Newgate's* Account of Dying Speeches into lamentable rhyme. I was afterwards concerned in works, that required a greater fund of erudition, such as bog-house miscellanies, and little books for children; and I was once engaged as the principal compiler of a two-penny magazine. Since that I followed the occupation of an Eves-dropper, or Collector of News for the daily papers; in which I turned a good penny by hunting after marriages and deaths, and inventing lyes for the day. Once indeed, being out of other business, I descended to the mean office of a ballad-singer, and hawked my own verses; but not having a good ear for music, and the tone of my voice being rather inclined to whining, I converted my ballads into penitential hymns, and took up the vocation of Methodist Preacher. In this station I made new converts every day among the old women by my sighs and groans, who in return contributed their half-pence, which I disposed of in charity — to myself: but I was at last beat off the field by a journeyman shoe-maker, who fairly out-



whined me; and finding myself deserted by my usual audience, I became Setter to a Fleet-parson.

My employment now was to take my stand at the end of *Fleet-Market*, and whenever I saw any gaping young couple staring about them, to whisper them softly in the ear, and ask them whether they wanted to be married; assuring them withal, that ours was the only marriage-booth in the fair. Whenever the ceremony was performed, I officiated as clerk: and when my master the doctor died, I made a shift to purchase his entire stock in trade, (consisting of a rusty cassock, an old grizzle wig, and one lappet of a band) and succeeded him in his benefice of the *Hand-and-Pen Chapel*. I now got a more comfortable subsistence than many regularly ordained curates in the country: but the marriage-act soon after taking place, I was flung out of employ; and as the Primate of *May-Fair*, the reverend Dr. *Keith*, is forced to sell snuff in the Fleet-prison, I have been obliged to retail gin in a night-cellar.

Thus, Mr. Town, have I set before you the progress I have made in literature, as well as the particular circumstances of my life, in hopes they will induce you to the notice of the public. As the parliament has not thought fit to make any provision for the poor distressed Clergy of the Fleet, I intend to open a New Oratory-Chapel in *Fleet-market*, to be conducted on the same principles with that established in *Clare-market*; and for which, I flatter myself, I shall appear no less qualified by my education, than the renowned *Henley* or any of his butchers. I shall therefore beg leave to subscribe myself, hoping for your countenance and protection,

*Your very humble servant,*

ORATOR HIGGINS.

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